

F.A.H.P. News, March 19, 2012

The Famous Douglas DC-7: Starting in the late 1930s, there was keen competition in large American aircraft between several well-known builders. At first Douglas Aircraft seemed to have the edge, then it would be Boeing for a while. When the demands of World War II required both military bombers and large cargo planes, the competition intensified. The developing passenger carriers had purchased many Douglas DC-3s, a twin-engine passenger plane that could carry between 22 and 28 passengers. With minor modifications, the Army Air Force called this the C-47. With demand for greater range and increasing loads, Douglas came up with the 4-engine C-54, of which the Air Transport Command had many, including several squadrons that flew out of New Castle Air Base in Delaware for points in Europe and the Middle East. As the commercial airlines had similar demands immediately following the war, a lot more “civilian C-54s” were built and were called DC-4s. Douglas was a major player in the building of large airplanes as World War II concluded. The main plant was in Long Beach, California, with satellite construction locations in Oklahoma and Illinois. During the war alone, Douglas built nearly 30,000 airplanes, about 16% of worldwide production. In the late 1940s, almost every major airline owned DC-4s for its long-distance routes. The competition was from Consolidated Aircraft’s Constellation and Boeing’s Stratocruiser, which was essentially a B-29 with a 17-passenger underbelly that served as a cocktail lounge. Only a very few of all these planes had pressurized cabins.

A larger and slightly faster version of the DC-4 appeared by the late ‘40s, and was called a DC-6. With a pressurized cabin, it could fly at higher altitudes and could carry up to 70 passengers. Again, the commercial airlines bought these in great quantity, and they fast succeeded DC-4s for long-distance air travel.

Last week, Bob Wilhelm sent a digital movie of the DC-7, the largest and by far the fastest of this series of airplanes, which was introduced in 1954. One that is still being flown was demonstrated and ably described by two veteran pilots. The huge engines, of which there were four, had an innovative way to use exhaust gases for more power and higher efficiency. As a travel agent in Wilmington, I was invited, along with many other agents, to fly on a brand new DC-7 being promoted by United Air Lines. We took off from Philadelphia International, flew around South Jersey and its beaches, had a good airline meal, and landed back at Philadelphia about 1½ hours later. Many of the foreign carriers, plus United, American, and Delta, ordered DC-7s much faster than they could be built. They carried a pay load of about 85 passengers.

The DC-7s’ heyday was brief, however. In 1955, Boeing got back into the commercial airline business full blast with the introduction of its jet-powered 707, with increased air speed of 200 m.p.h. over piston planes, much greater range, and a fuselage that carried 160 passengers. The Atlantic could easily be flown nonstop in about 6 hours! This time, Boeing could not keep up with demand, and planes were backordered for several years. The jet age was here to stay.

Work Report: Twenty-two volunteers attended the session on Tuesday night, and sixteen on Thursday, with several projects being advanced. On Tuesday, Butch Cannard and Mark Russell

made final plans for rebuilding the glass panels on the popcorn machine, and the maintenance-of-way crew completed additional track work before dark. The locomotives were greased and a needed adjustment was made to the Johnson Bar on #401. Progress toward painting and final installation of the pump box on the Stanley Model 607 was accomplished, some fellow clip work was done (the threaded studs are 11-24, an obsolete size), and the mill is undergoing a new paint job on the standard-gauge Lionel layout. The monthly meeting of the Events Committee was also held.

On Thursday, the Model 87 was fired up and road tested, first by Steve Bryce and then by Bill Schwoebel. The engine case was then installed, and it was filled to the proper level with oil. The underbody of the Model 607 was hand painted, after a thorough cleaning and sanding of this area. Refinements were made to the Johnson Bar adjustment on Locomotive 401, and it was discovered that the front water tank on the Stanley Model 87 was leaking. The paper-hanging job was finished on the boiler and bonnet of the Model 725. Parts were assembled for possible sale at the BRAACA Swap Meet on April 15. These parts, now upstairs in the museum, will need to be priced before being taken to the meet at Rob Robison's new facility in New Garden Township.

In addition to the twice-a-week work sessions, a lot of track work was completed during daylight hours by Bill Schwoebel and his track team of Brent McDougall, Robert Hopkins, Jeff Pollock, Dave Leon, Tim Nolan, and Jonathan Rickerman, and work on the 607 body and Rauch & Lang electric car by Tim Nolan, Jerry Novak, and Emil Christofano.

On Tuesday, the following volunteers were on hand: Jerry Lucas (in charge), Bill Schwoebel, Dave Leon, Jerry Novak, Steve Bryce, Mark Hopkins, Mark Russell, Tim Ward, Tim Nolan, Bob Jordan (in charge of 607 work), Ted Kamen, Dennis Dragon, Butch Cannard, Mac Taylor, Jay Williams, Jeff Pollock, Emil Christofano, Anne Cleary (Events), Art Sybell (Events), Rose Ann Hoover (Events), Brent McDougall (Events), and Tom Marshall.

On Thursday, the volunteers were Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Steve Bryce (early), Butch Cannard, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Bob Stransky, Dave Leon, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Chuck Erikson, Lou Mandich, Anne Cleary, Gerhard Maute, Eugene Maute, Dave Lumley (visiting from Georgia with the male members of his extended family), and Tom Marshall.

Our volunteer Ed Paschall underwent an operation to improve his hearing about two weeks ago, and complications included a heart attack and a mild stroke. He is presently recuperating at the Ware Presbyterian Health Care Center in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Anyone wishing to send Ed a note of encouragement may mail it to: Ed Paschall, 267 Line Road, Kennett Square PA 19348.